

Please contact us to reserve  
our original activities  
or to order a tailor-made plan.

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# Yamaura Adventures

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## Yamaura Adventures

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# Yamaura Adventures – For 10,000 years, one with the Mountains –



Chino Tabi

## What is Yamaura?

Yamaura means “in the mountain’s shadow”. It describes the unique environment of the rural villages in Chino as they stand right under the peaks of the Yatsugatake Mountains, at an elevation of 1,000 ~1,200m.

## About us

We believe that there is more to travel than just sightseeing. This is why at Chino Tabi we make it our mission to design special journeys where, instead of hastily passing by a location, you have the chance to immerse yourself into local life. Our original activities and tailor-made tours connect you, the travelers, and the locals.

For 10,000 years the locals have lived under the shadow of the Yatsugatake Mountains, in harmony with nature and attuned to all the seasons, even the coldest winters. Our objective is – to still be “one with the Mountains” 100 years from now –.

Chino Tabi Concierge







## Nature: A region perched in the foothills of a massive mountain range

Stretching from the peaks of the Yatsugatake at 2,899m to where the Suwa Valley begins at 700m, the Chino area is rich in natural landscapes.

From the stark and awe-inspiring rocky scenery of Mt. Akadake to the lush mossy conifer forests of the highland and the nostalgic pastoral villages of the rural area, the diverse local environment is a sight to behold.







## History: A story that goes back 10,000 years

People have inhabited the region for almost 10,000 years. Numerous elegant artifacts, dating all the way back to the Jomon period (the Japanese stone age), have been excavated throughout the area. At Suwa Taisha, one of the oldest sanctuaries in Japan, people still worship the spirit of nature and perpetuate the mysterious and primeval festival of Onbashira, a celebration of the deity when huge trees felled and dragged down the mountains by manpower alone are erected around the perimeter of the shrines.



## Culture: A life in tune with the land and its seasons

Like their Jomon ancestors, the locals lead a life in harmony with nature. In spring, they forage wild vegetables in the satoyama. In summer, they channel the cool waters of mountain streams into ancient waterways to grow rice and vegetables. In autumn, they pick mushrooms and nuts at the base of the mountains and pickle food to preserve until the next green season. In winter, they make use of the cold mountain breeze to produce distinctive food and crafts such as kanten and sharp blades. They are one with the mountains.



## Explore the Highlights

### Lake Shirakaba

Highland lake surrounded by birch trees, where you can enjoy aquatic sports such as canoeing and paddle boarding.



### Kurumayama

A grassland plateau situated at 1925m, Kurumayama offers great hiking routes, a 360° panorama view, and a mountain lift to reach the top with ease.



### Ski resorts

Chino is not commonly known as snow country, but the unparalleled high "clear sky ratio" and breathtaking views from the slopes are sure to attract many ski fans.



### Town and Rural village area

### Togari-ishi Jomon Archaeological Museum

Among its various invaluable artifacts, the museum exhibits two of the oldest statuettes in the world: the "Jomon Venus" and the "Masked Goddess." Meeting these 5,000-year-old ladies is surely worth a visit.



### Suwa Taisha

One of Japan's oldest sanctuaries, Suwa Taisha is a place of high mysticism where four gigantic pillars called "onbashira" mark the sacred space of the hall of worship.



### Rural area (Yamaura)

A nostalgic rural area where you can still find century-old farmhouses and pastoral sceneries untouched by urbanization, the Yamaura is an excellent place to do a homestay experience or take a walk.



### Lake Shirakaba and Kurumayama area

### Tateshina area

### Onsen

A secret thermal site used by the samurai of old, Tateshina has plenty of day-use hot springs and hot spring inns.



### Yokoya Gorge

Lush gorge where a 6km trail follows a river interwoven with waterfalls, the Yokoya Gorge is a must-see in the autumn foliage season.



### Mishaka Pond

An increasingly popular photo spot, this picturesque pond reflects the surrounding conifer forest like a mirror.



### Yatsugatake Mountain area

### Moss Forest

This conifer forest, where a velvety carpet of moss covers everything in sight, looks like it just came out of Hayao Miyazaki's anime world.



### Kita-Yatsugatake Ropeway

The Ropeway takes you up the Yatsugatake Mountains, going from 1771m to 2237m in about seven minutes. From the summit, you can explore Tsubo-Niwa park, a natural garden of igneous rocks, or trek to the nearby peaks.



### Trekking

The southern side of the Yatsugatake reaches a height of almost 3,000m and has dozens of challenging trails that will not fail to excite even the more experienced hiker. Let's trek safely!







Chers amis,

How is everything going? As promised, I'm updating you on my *second* journey to the land of the rising sun. The theme this time is art and tradition.

I'm going to visit *edgy* museums and *cutting-edge* architecture. Initially, I was planning to travel directly to Matsumoto from Tokyo. Then, I stumbled across an inspiring tour featuring some quirky tea houses by an architect named Fujimori Terunobu.

It looked too interesting to pass up, and the Chino city area is on the way to Matsumoto.

Long story short, we are in Chino now and will be staying for one night. After doing some research, I realized two of the world's oldest and most graceful prehistoric statuettes are here. I couldn't possibly give up the chance to see them.

Also, the tour organizers suggested that we join in some local experiences in a traditional rural village off the beaten track, which sounded very interesting.

Both my husband and I wanted to get away from the crowd and *see* a more intimate side of Japan. This detour seemed the perfect occasion to do just that.



## ① Heading toward the Yatsugatake Mountains

Our guide picked us up from Chino Station and drove us to the rural village area at about 1,000m of elevation. Terraced rice fields flooded with water paved the way toward the Yatsugatake.



Day 1



## ② Sasahara, a hamlet stilled in time

Our destination was Sasahara, a tiny village perched in the foothills of the Yatsugatake that looked as if it had come from some old tale.

## ③ “Kote-e” street art

The village is not a tourist spot, so we had a local grandpa show us around to better enjoy the local charm. We explored hidden shrines dedicated to the god of the mountain, traditional houses, and well-kept gardens. The most unexpected discovery for us was the popular art of kote-e, relief paintings made of shikkui plaster. Here, dragons, turtles, deities, and dozens of other subjects decorate the walls of farmers' warehouses. They are this region's own rural “street art.”

This kote-e of kittens was on the warehouse of a household with many real cats



We were even invited inside a villager's century-old farmhouse



## ④ Foraging for wild vegetables

In spring, the villagers often go into the satoyama in search of food. As part of our culinary experience, we followed a local through the unplowed fields and woods bordering the village to look for seasonal herbs such as fukinoto, seri, and koshi-abura.

Look at how many wild veggies we found!





**5 Cooking with the village grannies**

Later on, we visited a cute grannie who introduced us to local cuisine. We gathered some herbs and made crispy tempura. Then, we prepared rustic mochi served with a flavorful and thick perilla sauce and some dainty, colorful agar cakes!

This time we went for milk and strawberry, but you can make agar cakes with literally any ingredient

**6 A quiet evening at a Japanese inn**

We spent the night at a sleek ryokan not far from the village. The interiors were traditional but fresh and comfortable. We enjoyed using the two large and private thermal baths, and dinner was pleasing both to the palate and the eye.

**Day 2****7 A visit to the Jomon museum**

The voluptuous figures of the "Jomon Venus" and "Masked Goddess"

After checking out, we headed for a museum of Japanese prehistoric art to see two of the world's most ancient statuettes. I was genuinely impressed with the elegance of some artifacts on display. They are thousands of years old but as stunning as ever.

**8 Bike rental at Chino Station**

Back at the station, we decided to rent two electric bikes so we could move around with ease.

**9 Cycling under the cherry blossoms**

Our little trip to Chino happened to be exactly in the middle of the cherry blossom season. We didn't expect to see any sakura in full bloom so late in April, so it was a welcome surprise when we gazed upon a multitude of pink flowers on the way to the ancient shrine of Suwa Taisha.





## 10 An exclusive tour of Suwa Taisha and Fujimori Terunobu's quirky architecture

In the afternoon, we joined a private tour to visit some unique tea houses by the up-and-coming architect Fujimori Terunobu. The program started at Suwa Taisha, where Nature worship still has a central role in the community's spiritual life. Every key point inside the sanctuary was marked by magnificent centenarian trees, and ablutions were performed at a mountain stream.



Four huge pillars called "onbashira" mark the site of the hall of worship



The exhibition at the entrance of the Jinchokan Museum took me by surprise. It had such a primeval feeling to it.

## To the tea houses!

My inner child got excited at the sight of such fantastical architecture. First, we went into the flying mud house, a blowfish-like tea house suspended in midair. After that, we climbed to the too-high tea house and had a casual tea ceremony at the too-low tea house, the one that looks like a modern Jomon pit dwelling.

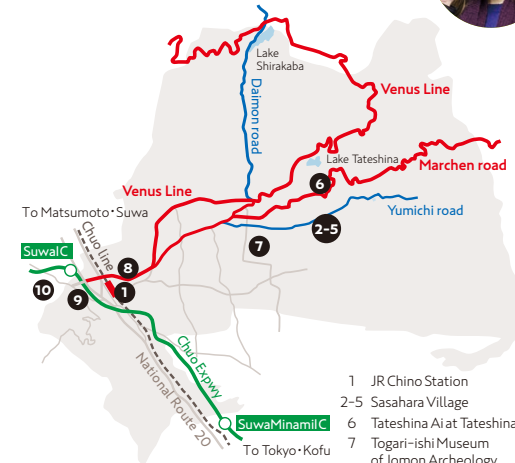


## 11 And back again

These past two days were full of adventures. I am so glad we made this small detour.

## About this tailored tour

The participants were a French couple in their 40s who came to Chino to take part in Fujimori Terunobu's tea house tour. They were particularly interested in art and design but also wanted to see a bit of rural Japan. We suggested some authentic satoyama experiences in a small village, also famous for artistic plaster craft. And to complement their architecture tour, we added a visit to the local Jomon prehistoric art museum.



- 1 JR Chino Station
- 2-5 Sasahara Village
- 6 Tateshina Ai at Tateshina
- 7 Togari-ishi Museum of Jomon Archeology
- 8 JR Chino Station (Tourist Information Counter)
- 9 The Bank of Miyagawa River
- 10 Suwa Taisha - Upper Shrine - Maemiya Jinchokan Moriya Historical Museum and Fujimori's Architectures

## Itinerary





Hi there,

How are things? I'm on a family trip with Jane and the kids.

This year we went all out and flew to Japan. We rented a car and are now traveling through the country.

While doing the classic tour of Tokyo and Kyoto, we also want to enjoy the countryside, see nature, and hike a little. Which is why we spent one night in Chino, an off-the-beaten-track mountain area between Karuizawa and Mt.Fuji.

We first found out about Chino when we stumbled upon an article about a mossy forest in the region that looks a lot like Yakushima.

Jane, of course, wanted to check it out, so I started browsing through travel websites to see what else we could do in the area. Turns out Chino has a lot to offer.



## Day 1



## ① Driving up the mountain

We left Karuizawa in the morning and headed to the Moss Forest, at the top of the Yatsugatake Mountain Range.

A picture of moss taken through a loupe

## ② The Moss Forest

The forest indeed felt like a magical place.

The entire ground was covered in a thick layer of moss, which also grew on rocks and gnarly roots of trees.



The forest reminded me of that anime by Hayao Miyazaki



## ③ Exploring the forest with a guide

To make the best of our time there, we joined a tour. The guide showed us many small and hidden wonders, which we would have certainly passed by without noticing if we had been on our own.

But nothing beats the kids' excitement.

They were each given a loupe, which is a small magnifying glass, and looked like little explorers, meticulously checking every centimeter of moss.

Toward the end of the tour, we also had a "mini" photoshoot in the moss with a bunch of toy figurines.



## ④ Savory lunch at an old farmhouse

Afterward, we stopped for lunch at a farmhouse café in the foothills of the Yatsugatake.

The century-old building had a nostalgic beauty, and the traditional local dishes were mouth-watering.



Such a colorful and dainty meal

## ⑤ Fun with soba noodles and a stay at a local minshuku

With our bellies full, we drove to Lake Shirakaba – a mountain resort at 4600ft.

There, on the lakeshore, was Minshuku Asahigaoka, a family-run inn where we joined a private soba experience and stayed for the night.

The kids had the time of their life, intently kneading the soba dough and cutting the noodles. But if possible, Jane and I enjoyed ourselves even more.

I felt so grateful that the master shared his in-depth knowledge about soba with us.

Oh, and the food was amazing!



The master is also a farmer, and all the ingredients were homegrown





## Day 2

## ⑥ Morning canoe ride

After breakfast, we walked down to the canoe school.

As it was the first time for both kids, we joined a short lesson.

The kids insisted on riding on their own, and in less than two hours, they were boldly canoeing across the lake.

They almost outran us.



## ⑦ Mountain lift ride to a 360°panoramic view

Just a short drive from the lake was Mt. Kurumayama, where a lift takes you to 6,315ft.

From the summit, we had a breath-taking view of the Alps, Mt.Fuji, and the Yatsugatake.



All the brightly colored canoes really livened up the lake

View from the top



## ⑧ A carpet of daylilies

Before leaving, we got off at the halfway station to enjoy the daylilies (Nikko-kisuge).

The green slopes sprinkled with yellow were so pretty that we spent a good part of the morning walking up and down the path taking pictures.



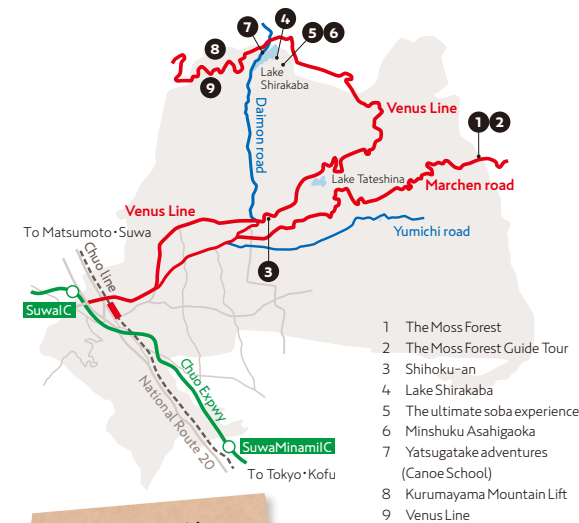
## ⑨ Scenic drive above the clouds

Instead of heading straight to the highway, we set out along the Venus Line scenic route. I must say I'm happy we did.

Mile after mile, we enjoyed an unobstructed view of the Alps and the valley below.

## About this tailored tour

We planned this tour for a family from the US, who traveled with two small children. They wanted to enjoy natural landscapes, do some hands-on activities, and most of all, make sure their kids had fun. Since they wanted to be active, we had them stay in Lake Shirakaba, a mountain resort with plenty of outdoor activities such as canoeing and horse-back riding.



## Itinerary





Yamaura  
Adventures

# Autumn

Create your own knife experience at “Sadamasa,” a century-old smithy

Hi there!

How’s it going? I’m on a trip with Jack, and you probably can guess where.

I know, Japan again. But, hey, there’s just so much stuff to do!

This time, the purpose of the trip was to walk the Nakasendo Road in Kiso.

But Jack found out about a unique experience to make your own Japanese knife in Nagano, so we had to stop by on our way back.

You know how Jack is obsessed with Japanese blades.

To tell you the truth, the activity looked intriguing to me too.

It’s in a place called Chino, something like 30 minutes from Matsumoto (the city with the castle) and not far from Kiso. The location is stunning, perched in the foothills of this massive mountain range called Yatsugatake and totally immersed in nature.

Since we had to stay two days for the knife experience anyway, we looked for more things to do. Somehow, we ended up staying one extra night.

It’s been an adventure!



## ① JR Chino Station

Just got to Chino Station from Kiso.  
The smithy is just a 15-minute walk  
from here.

Day 1

## ② Becoming blacksmiths for two days

They promised an authentic experience, and they delivered.  
The smithy itself was memorable, with its soot-caked walls  
and well-used machinery, and the smith was so welcoming.  
On the first day, we mainly worked at the forge,  
shaping the metal into a knife.  
We got to see the smith at work (such precision and speed!)  
and actively took part in the process of hammering,  
cutting and fixing the knife with our own hands.



## ③ An unforgettable homestay at a farmer's house

In the afternoon, we moved up the mountain to an idyllic rural area for our farmstay experience. Our hosts for the day was the Hiruma family, a young couple with two small kids. They picked us up and drove us to their place, a big 100-year-old traditional farmhouse.

We tried many activities such as harvesting rice and making dry persimmons.  
We also prepared dinner together, using homemade miso paste and homegrown vegetables we picked ourselves.

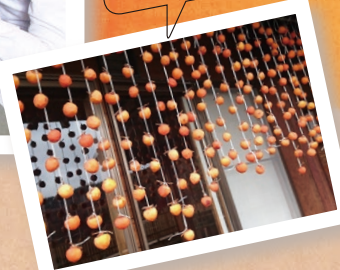


Our eco-friendly dinner:  
miso soup with tofu,  
pickles, okowa rice, and  
pumpkin.



Staying with them felt so natural, like visiting a friend  
you haven't seen in a while. I have to confess, I cried a  
little when we said goodbye the following morning.

In Japan they call it  
"persimmon curtain,"  
and now I can see why





We used four different  
whetstones  
to sharpen the blade!



#### ④ Our own Japanese knife!

After breakfast, our host took us to the smithy, and we picked up where we had left off. The second day was all about adding a cutting edge to the blade and making it sharp. It was so emotional to watch the core of steel slowly surface from its iron shell under the smith's skillful hands.



Our tour guide, Paul from  
Yatsugatake Cycling.  
Such a passionate cyclist!



#### ⑤ Cycling in the foothills of the Yatsugatake

I couldn't resist the prospect of a cycling tour in such a scenic place. We pedaled through picturesque farming villages, quiet woods, and terraced fields with unobstructed views of the three Alps ranges.



Nothing says autumn  
in rural Japan like  
rice fields after the harvest

#### ⑥ Stay at a traditional onsen ryokan

Further up the mountain, around 1500m, there's an onsen retreat area called Tateshina.

That's where we spent the last night, in a Japanese inn tucked away deep in the woods.

Legend has it that a famous samurai used to bathe in the smooth milky waters that flow at Tatsunokan to heal his wounds after a fight.





## 7 A photogenic pond

There's no way we could leave without checking out the autumn foliage. So, on our last day, we planned a hike to the nearby Lake Tateshina passing through Yokoya Gorge. The first spot on the way was Mishaka Pond, a mirror of water that reflects the surrounding landscape.



A photo of Otaki Falls taken from the observation spot



## 8 Hiking amid a whirlwind of colors

Walking through Yokoya Gorge was like entering an impressionist painting. The entire forest was colored with brush strokes of vibrant reds, yellows, and greens.



## 9 Lunch with lake view

After two hours and eight km, we reached our goal, Lake Tateshina. We had a hearty helping of soba noodles (the local specialty) for lunch while enjoying the view of the lakeshore lined up with momiji.

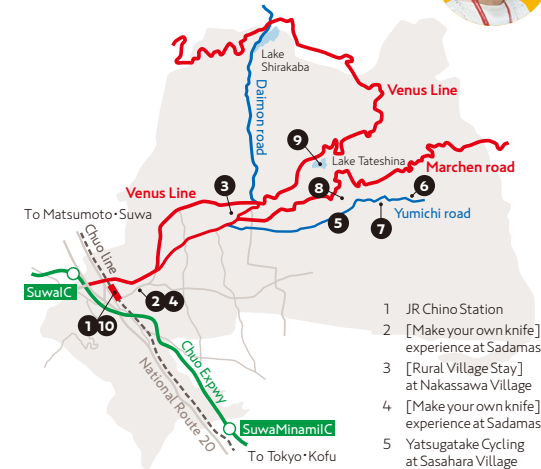


## 10 Back to Chino Station

A local bus took us to the station, our last stop for this trip. It's been an adventure!

## About this tailored tour

A couple from Australia in their late 20s wanted to join our experience to make a Japanese knife. They like to be active, so we also suggested some outdoor activities to enjoy autumn in the yamaura, such as a cycling tour across the countryside and a short hike in the highland to view the autumn foliage. As we wanted them to taste some local food and experience the harvest season in rural Japan, we also threw in a farmstay.



- 1 JR Chino Station
- 2 [Make your own knife] experience at Sadamasa
- 3 [Rural Village Stay] at Nakassawa Village
- 4 [Make your own knife] experience at Sadamasa
- 5 Yatsugatake Cycling at Sasahara Village
- 6 Shibuno Yu Tatsunokan at Oku Tateshina
- 7 Mishaka Pond
- 8 Yokoya Gorge
- 9 Lake Tateshina
- 10 JR Chino Station

## Itinerary

Day 3





Sake tour at Masumi, a renowned brewery

Hello. You good?

It's too bad you couldn't join us this year. You missed out on so much fun. Don't worry, though. As I'm a good friend, I'm going to give you a detailed account of the whole trip.

As you know, this year we went snowboarding in Hakuba. At first, we intended to stay there the whole time, but as the girls insisted on doing something outside the ski resorts, we all agreed to change the plan for the last three days.

Someone suggested visiting a sake brewery, and, as you can imagine, the consensus was unanimous. We found an exciting tour in an area called Suwa, on the way back to Tokyo. The company organizing it offered other intriguing winter activities in the vicinity, and we picked a few.



## ① Train ride to Chino

Day 1

From Hakuba, we changed trains at Nagano Station and arrived in Chino in about two and a half hours.

## ② Toward the Yatsugatake Mountains

Our guide met us at the station and took us to our first activity. As we got closer to the rural area, we were met by a spectacular view of the snow-capped Yatsugatake Mountains.



## ④ In search of icefalls

In the afternoon, we put on light crampons and hiked through a glacial gorge in search of icefalls. The landscape was otherworldly, with long cascades of glimmering ice coating the steep rock walls.



We had frozen tofu stew, okara salad and soy milk agar cake



## ③ Visit to a frozen tofu producer

You're probably wondering what's frozen tofu- I know I was. As the name suggests, it's a preserved food made by laying slices of tofu outside to freeze. We visited a family-run shop, where we watched the master at work and even tried tofu making with our own hands. Being able to talk to the producer was a matchless experience.

## ⑤ Cozy pension up in the mountain

On the first night, we stayed in a pension – family-run western-style lodging – where they serve delicious homemade meals. The girls loved the cute retro interiors, and I really enjoyed the fragrant bread and savory bacon served at breakfast.



## ⑥ Ropeway ride to the top of the mountain

After breakfast, the pension owner drove us to Kita-Yatsugatake Ropeway, the starting point of our snow hike.

Day 2

The contrast of the red ropeway against the snowy mountain was so eye-catching it demanded a picture





## 7 Snowshoe hike through a mountain in winter

I always thought hiking a mountain in winter was out of my reach, so I was pretty excited for this tour.

The trail was easy to walk, and once we got to the peak, the scenery was breathtaking.

Roddy, our guide, taught us how to read the snow and showed us some fascinating natural phenomena such as frozen trees, riming, and sastrugi.



We were blessed with great weather and could see all the way from the Southern to the Northern Alps



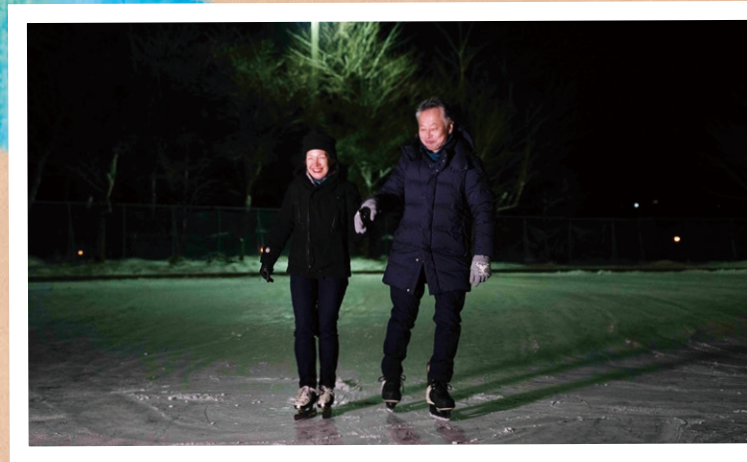
## 8 Shake off the cold at a local onsen bath

After our little adventure in the frosty mountain environment, we craved the warmth of hot springs.

Luckily for us, the bus bound for the station passed through Tateshina, a famous onsen destination. We soaked in a large bath with a great view of the Alps.



We also helped the locals do minor repairs to the rink



## 9 Fun night at a schoolyard ice-skating rink

You may have realized it by now, but this area is seriously cold!

That's why the locals had the idea of flooding their schoolyards in winter to make handmade skating rinks.

At night, we visited one and tried skating.

The locals taught us patiently and, by the end, we were fairly good at it.



These are geta skates. Here, people used to wear them when skating!



## 10 A few drinks before bed

As the road to the hotel was lined with several small izakaya, we decided to stop by a couple for a few drinks and a light meal.



They had an excellent selection of local sake labels

## 12 Masumi sake brewery tour

The guide took us to the heart of the brewery, where all the action takes place. We got to see every stage of production from the rice steaming to the sake filtering. We were lucky enough to watch as they poured the yeast into the starter. It was very theatrical. The visit ended with a tasting. We had fragrant and dry sake, a fruit-flavored liqueur, and sweet amazake.



## 11 Suwa area, one of Japan's top sake destinations

There are nine sake breweries in the region, and most have been in business for more than three centuries. The one we visited, Masumi, is among the oldest.

Day 3



## 13 And back to Tokyo

A little tipsy from the tasting, we boarded the train to Tokyo.

## About this tailored tour

We made this plan for a group of friends in their 30s from Singapore. They were looking for something to do after their ski trip to Hakuba.

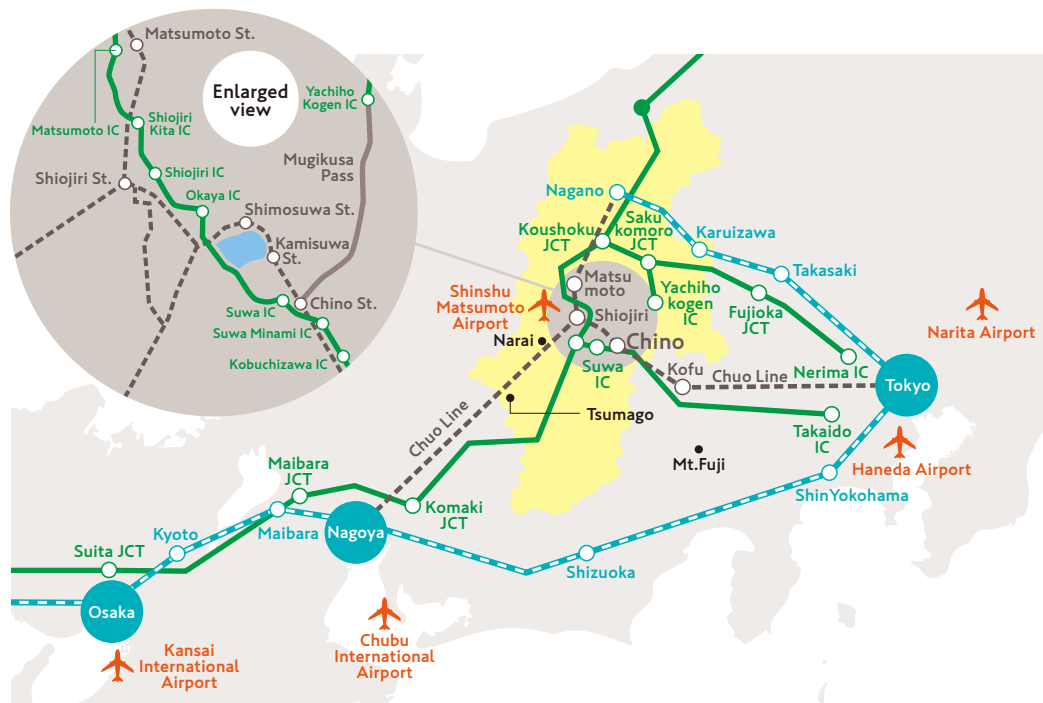
We proposed some adventurous activities to enjoy a few highlights of the winter season, such as a snowshoe hike high up in the Yatsugatake Mountains, a visit to a frozen tofu producer, and a schoolyard ski rink.



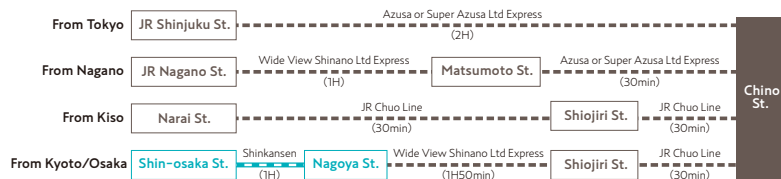
Itinerary



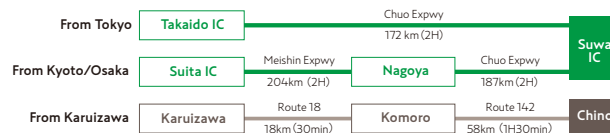
# ACCESS MAP



## By train



## By car



About Chino

Spring

Summer

Autumn

Winter

Yamaura Adventures

Winter

Access Map